

(Part Two)

GIFTS OF FLESH

BY ROSEMARY KYARIMPA

"What are you waiting for?" the Minister rudely asked. Hamurungi knew at once that her customer had no more time to waste. Oh, he may be among that category of men who knew nothing about the preliminaries of real sex. But what did she care? She came to make dollars, not to debate whether it was the egg or the chicken that came first. She immediately threw her short dress off, and proceeded to the bed. She lay on the bed, face upwards. She waited for the worst. No sooner had her mind started to linger on thoughts of the unknown again than the Minister yelled out.

"You silly goat, you think I came here for jokes? Ever heard of the role of women in looking after men's clothes?" What does he mean, now? Hamurungi thought. If he meant she should immediately go to the bathroom to wash his clothes, then he was obviously drunk. He knew too well that she was not his wife, Veronica. And even if she were, there would be a maid somewhere or a washing machine to do the dirty work. That aside, they were now in a hotel, and there was a laundry department somewhere, no doubt. Unable to understand the meaning of the Minister's words, Hamurungi got off the bed, and approached the intercom. She lifted the receiver, and as she was about to dial zero for the switchboard, the Minister interrupted her with a commanding voice.

"Come here, you fool!" he barked. Hamurungi dropped the receiver instantly, and came to his side.

"Now start here," the Minister indicated his necktie, then his shirt. Hamurungi understood the meaning. She must remove his clothes, one by one. This man was really bossy, she thought. He had bought her thighs, not her labor. Why was he behaving as though he had paid a large herd of cows to her parents, to make her his household slave? Those women who stayed closed behind their husbands' doors, doing all sorts of embarrassing duties, were the ones fit for such tasks. Was this man in his right senses? He certainly did not have long before he was chained and taken inside the cold walls of Butabika Mental Hospital. Hamurungi was about to tell the arrogant buyer to his face that he was a poor customer, when she suddenly remembered the grisly stories told by some of the girls. She remembered how, after a night's treat, one girl had returned with bleeding genitals. She recounted her ordeal at the hands of a cruel buyer. The buyer had taken her to his house in Muyenga, and instead of utilizing his genitals, had instead used a large stick on her. The girl cried out loudly, tearing at the man's face with her fingernails. She could have died, had it not been for the kind interruption of the intermittent telephone ringing. Her loud cries alerted the neighbors, and they phoned the man, disguised as Police. Although in pain, the girl picked the major issues of the phone call. The neighbors threatened to come over for the man on charges of rape and indecent assault, and God-knew whether he would ever come out of the gates of Luzira Upper Prison. The man fumed and threatened on the phone, and he told the *Police* to dare him if they wanted bullets of his AK-47 gun through their proud chests. Oh, the man had a gun!

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The girl knew that her end had come. She started shivering immediately, and by the time the buyer came back to resume his beastly sport, the girl was shaking like a leaf in the wind. The man realized he had lost his playground, and boxed her ears instead. He threw her out of the house, and bolted himself inside. Luckily for her, the man's house was near the roadside. The girl shuffled slowly to the road, and waved at a special hire taxi. The taxi dropped her in Kisenyi, almost dead. The other girls contributed some money, and rushed her to a nearby clinic. She gradually recovered, but she took about two months without going back to business. Hamurungi also recalled Suzy's story of the girl who went for a long treat at the Nigerian's house. Why was she dogged by gruesome thoughts? She must hope for the best. So, she descended on the Minister and started removing his clothes...one by one...

It was a few minutes after seven o'clock in the morning. Hamurungi lay on the bed, her mind constantly wandering to the previous night's encounter with the Minister. How distasteful and utterly disgusting! The Minister must be one of those mentally sick persons. Her suspicions might as well get confirmed. From what the Minister asked her to do to him, there was no doubt he was destined for Butabika Mental Hospital. She had read with astonishment about men who slept with goats, cows, and chicken. Given chance, the Minister could have booked in a chicken to sleep with at the Sheraton. She could not understand how a whole Minister could fail to use his stick of manhood well. He could be impotent, in fact. Yes, he was! Hamurungi thought. But how could he have managed to keep Madam Veronica with him, and also to produce children with her? She was sure the couple had children, or perhaps they adopted them from Sanyu Babies' Home! Well, the point now was not whether the couple had children or not. The point was that the Minister had failed to use his sexual gadgets, and instead asked Hamurungi to eat his thing. What a disgusting experience it was! At first, she thought it was joke, but the Minister went ahead to lie down, and he indicated to her where to nibble. She could have fainted or simply died. She remembered the case involving the American president with a famous fat girl, then the probing questions of the lawyers whether the girl had actually sucked his thing, or whether he was the one who sucked hers, through the famous American or was it the Cuban cigar! As she pondered over the American president's issue, she realized that the Ministers and other high profile people in government must have copied the American example of having their things eaten, instead of using them to eat gifts of flesh. She also thought about the sexy Monica, who nearly brought disaster to the most powerful man in the world, by declaring her odd experiences to the public. At least that girl was a bit better off than Hamurungi. She worked in the White House, and she enjoyed the comforts of the egg-shaped office, plus expensive gifts from the big man. But what of her? What comfort could she boast of with her straw mattress and the thin *lesu* she used as a blanket? And her mean Bank of Uganda Kimira had so far failed to become financially viable. He still harped about his string of home problems, his wife's saloon costs, and lots of distasteful stuff that bored a girl to the marrow. Perhaps it was time she abandoned the mean-handed *manfriend*. Maybe she could begin to plan strategically. For once, she could pretend to love the dirty job of eating the Minister's thing, and then ask him for a job in his office. How about being the tea girl, or the messenger? She should try out her luck, and who knows?

She could get rid of street earning, and metamorphose into a faithful tea girl in the Minister's office! She would then not only serve the Minister's belly, but his loins as well. A definite master plan, hooray! She must execute the plan as a matter of urgency. She jumped out of bed and went to the bathroom. She turned on the tap for hot water, and filled the gleaming bathtub to the brim. She reached for the long bottle of liquid shower fruits and poured the contents in the bath. The water immediately turned into a white froth. She lowered herself into the bathtub, and lay in the water. She started thinking of her master plan, and the tricks she would use to interest the Minister in her plan.

It was the second night for Hamurungi at the hotel. This time she was more cautious with herself, and with what she did. Her customer could hope in, any time now. She had just finished having her evening meal strictly served in the room, and she was now turning on the television set. What an awful place! The hotel could not even give some movies to the guests, some blue movies? Wow, she would have loved to watch them in the comfort and privacy of this hotel. The girls always said that blue movies taught them the tricks of pleasing men. If this goddamn hotel knew how much their business could be boosted by well-grounded girls, they would supply the much-needed stuff to the rooms. Let those saying that blue movies were illegal pornography go to hell! If they were illegal, how come she and the other girls always collided with policemen in Mustafa's wooden video shack in Kisenyi, to watch them? Why was it that none of these policemen ever thought of arresting Mustafa, or confiscating his tapes? Instead, they always craned their necks to get in all the fine details of white characters having sex on the screen. Most times, the policemen shouted to Mustafa to rewind the most interesting scenes of the copulating couples, especially when they displayed styles similar to those of dogs in the rut.

It was past midnight. Finally, the Minister came into the room. He carried the day's newspaper in his hands. Hamurungi noticed a strange expression on his face. He was smiling broadly, as if he had just won a very hard battle. Could he have received news that his government's troops, fighting in a foreign country, had managed to annex a large part of territory to themselves? Maybe. She had heard much about the greedy antics of the country's troops in the neighboring country, including the violent destruction of a large sea point. The most contested place, people said, was located in the heart of the equatorial forests. The place had been baptized Eden, for its dark thick mats of vegetation, which stretched thousands of miles in the centre of the African continent. The country in which the army fought was also said to be rich in the much sought-after diamonds and gold. One of Hamurungi's friends had a brother who commanded the fighting army in the foreign country, and when he returned home for a secret visit, he told his family the actual story. The government had vowed that all its regiments and battalions would rather perish in the thick forests fighting for the rich minerals, than surrender the vast piece of land to the president of the aggressed country. He told them that politics and state sovereignty meant nothing other than power and control of rich resources. The more one had, the more powerful, and the more feared. Only fools and babies vomiting their mothers' breast milk challenged this fact. Had they never heard of the South African story, for example?

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Ha, the great Dutch and British invasion of that rich lower valley Eden was a good historical lesson, fresh in the minds of the whole globe! The whites were able to transform that quiet Garden of Eden with its fresh serene rivers into one of the wealthiest and modern lands this side of death. Yes, the invaders understood the philosophy of accessing, owning, and controlling the most important resources. Their cannons, rifles, and modern machine guns did the trick. They hounded the animal skin-clothed warriors crouching aimlessly with poised spears, pretending to guard their unused treasures of gold and diamonds. Thanks to the sharp-minded invaders, the continent now boasted of prestigious names like Durban, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth. That was in addition to the glittering statues of heroes like Cecil Rhodes and Jameson! Since those great days of conquest, which the commander called the renaissance of the Southern lands, the defeated kingdoms and warriors had resorted to singing nostalgic songs about their ancestral land and sickly animals gone with the wind! Although now claiming black Independence and black presidents, the clever invaders still controlled all the resources and structures. What better example did people want of where power was?

As Hamurungi's mind tried to read the secret behind the Minister's smile, she pretended to be shocked by the his presence.

"I thought you said you had night discussions of the latest strategies to counter the rebels," she said.

"Oh, my, I was forgetting about this completely," he replied, indicating the middle page of the paper.

"What does it say?" she asked, not so much out of eagerness, but rather out of surprise that someone who talked about a serious high profile meeting was suddenly gazing at a common newspaper as if it was a magical solution to all his government's problems.

"Wow, what glamour! Whew, and this sexy babe with a mermaid's neck! My, my, what a sexy ass! These girls are stunning!" he remarked. Hamurungi's surprise turned into anxiety. Which girls was he slobbering over? Perhaps an advert from brothel services, now that they had been allowed to feature in the public press? That would sell her out. She was done for, damn! She could not contain her anxiety and curiosity any longer. She walked to the left side of the Minister and bent her head forward. She fixed her eyes on the open page, and lo! There stood the most incredible thighs and breasts she ever came across. Oh, no! she cried quietly. When was the beauty contest held? She had registered herself for the catwalk, and she believed without doubt she would appear on the shortlist for the sexy beauty parade at Nile Hotel International.

"Ouch," she cried desperately, and fell on the patterned carpet on the floor. The Minister was shocked with the sudden rude interruption of his lecherous gaze at the page.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, pulling Hamurungi to sitting position. What did he care? she thought. Part of her mind told her it was senseless to hide her feelings from him, yet it was too big a blow to keep to herself. Would the Minister have any sympathy? She was in the room to satisfy his crazy desires, nothing more. But she must tell him, her wiser sense insisted.

After all, she planned to find a way to his heart soon, if her grand plan was too succeed.

"I notice that I have missed the Miss Tourism Beauty contest. My chance of a lifetime gone forever," she spoke with a heavy sigh.

"*He-he-he! Ha-ha-ha!*" the Minister laughed dryly. Hamurungi felt betrayed. The man did not have a single shred of human feeling inside his huge chest. She wished she had not tried to confide in him. She was contemplating an answer to his cold hostile laughter, when he spoke.

"Foolish girl, next time you open your silly mouth, first check your details. These are last year's beauties of the Miss Tourism promotion, featured to put the public into an expectant and sexy mood. The next Miss Tourism beauty pageant is one month away," he concluded with a chuckle.

This news did not impress Hamurungi. It was about six months back, since she submitted her application, complete with photographs taken in the nude, to the National Tourist Council. She remembered very well that the ugly receptionist of the National Tourist Council received her application. Hamurungi wondered what such an unsightly face was doing in an office dealing with national charm and attractions. Perhaps she was kept there as a rare species, to attract tourists with her long protruding teeth, which looked like the large tusks of an elephant. And she must no doubt have attracted quite a number of tourists, especially now that they could no longer visit Bwindi Impenetrable Forest to track the rare mountain gorillas. The ignominious murder of tourists by the *Interahamwe* made the government halt tourist visits. But this was no time for her to concern herself with a nasty-looking bag of flesh. How could 'it' possibly compete with her on the catwalk? She had better things to think about.

I must at once go to the National Tourist Council. They must have thrown my application in the dustbin! she thought. Her mind went back to the long questioning look the ugly receptionist had cast her, when she took her application. *She must have been jealous of my impeccable appearance,* she thought. *Yes, it must be the work of that ugly piece of handiwork!* Unable to face the fact that there were girls who were sexy enough to smooth the mountains of pimples on their faces, and also to attract important men like the Minister, that treacherous punk must have torn Hamurungi's application as soon as she turned her back away from the National Tourist Council office. She would pay highly for her folly, if she thought that Hamurungi was just a common girl walking the streets of the city. She was one of those rare but lucky girls, in as far natural fleshy attraction was concerned. Her seductive looks had won her the biggest customer so far, the Minister himself! And mind you, the man was not just those kinds of Ministers without portfolio, who merely choked Cabinet meetings with their stinking socks. The man was a whole Minister for Tourism and Natural Resources. Whenever he appeared, be it in the Cabinet chambers or the game reserves, all the insects and beings of the animal kingdom bowed to his mighty presence. He was indeed a very powerful man. One time, the journalists took his picture as he rested in a tree branch in one of the game reserves, conversing with baboons. And that reminded Hamurungi of yet another opportunity.

He could ask the Minister to influence the Selection Committee of the National Tourist Council for her name to appear on the selected list for the Miss Tourism Beauty contest. And that would be one way of killing two, actually three birds, with one stone.

The first bird Hamurungi wanted to kill was a job in the Minister's office. As soon as she got it, she would proceed to kill the second bird, which perched at the reception desk in the office of the National Tourist Council. The third bird, but by no means the least, was the rude receptionist of the Sheraton Hotel. In fact, she must effect the killing of that bird shortly before she left her hotel room, at the end of her business with the Minister. But she must first rub the Minister's back the right way, if she wanted the receptionist dismissed immediately. Wow, the Minister could complain to the hotel management that the rude receptionist turned off foreign tourists with big dollars in their purses. That was a definite path to success, and she had better be damned than fail to tread it.

Hamurungi temporarily suppressed her great desire to pursue the story of the Beauty contest list. She decided to start with the third bird, the hotel receptionist.

"I am tired of staying here," she started.

"What!?" the Minister looked at her with a puzzled expression.

"Did I hear right?" he continued.

"I can't stomach the receptionist. She has rang my room twice, and threatened to leak my presence here to a woman called Veronica," Hamurungi replied, putting on the most innocent expression.

"No, no, no! That is the least I expect from this hotel. I have warned them several times about the type of staff they recruit, but hear what they have! It's a shame that a whole five-star hotel recruits staff merely because they are related to the Manager's grandmother! This is incredible! I must at once get to the Executive Manager!" the Minister fumed, and started fidgeting with the buttons of his mobile phone. Hamurungi looked on with an amused expression. That was step number one into her grand plan of killing proud birds.

It was the fifth and last day of Hamurungi's stay at the hotel. She had just finished an extravagant dinner of oxtail soup, fish fillet, Italian pasta, and king-size pizzas. She now lay on the bed, sipping sherry and looking at the cool whitewashed ceiling. She felt like a powerful queen, having successfully influenced the dismissal of the rude receptionist. After a few minutes, she decided to switch on the television set. As if by telepathy from her distraught feelings, the National Tourist Council was announcing the names of the selected candidates for the coming Miss Tourism beauty pageant. She listened breathlessly, waiting for the invisible announcer to say her name. She watched the yellow letters of the lucky candidates' names glide onto a blue background, as the announcer read them out. The invisible voice now reached the sixth name. Hamurungi held her breath, because the warthog-faced receptionist had told her that the Council wanted only seven candidates.

The number 7 represented the original seven hills of Kampala City, and this harmonized matching of numbers with hills would attract more contest sponsors. It was as if she waited for eternity, before the announcer read the name of the last candidate. Bravo! Hamurungi was among the candidates! She sighed with relief. Her mind went straight to the beautiful messages of the Bible. Although she was not much of a believer in some of those farfetched verses, her heart now glowed at the philosophy of *the last coming first, and first coming last*. Time was ripe for her to test the truthfulness of such prophecies. She would see if her name, much as it had come last, would come first during the beauty contest. Wait a minute. She must not take things for granted like some gullible people who believed without seeing. Although she had just contemplated the miraculous philosophy about first as last and last as first, she must take firmer and sterner precautions to get to the top. The Minister must help her in this. He must get her to the top! She must become Miss Tourism for an entire year of beautiful and magical reign! Oh yes, she must win the crown, even if this meant eating the Minister's thing for eternity, to add a few drops of oil in her game of influence. She must settle for the best, and the best was the Miss Tourism title.

The announcements over, Hamurungi now settled to watch her favorite drama series, *Generations!* My, my! Those South African chicks knew how to act. Her favorite actress was Ntsiki, the deadly plotter obsessed with money and blackmail. Ntsiki had actually succeeded in hoodwinking the big company executive into a fake marriage, thanks to the gullibility of those who believed without seeing. Now she planned to seduce the man's overzealous son into sex. The witch really knew the things that mattered: sex and money. She was a successful example of the classical story of *Rags to Riches*. And who wanted to die poor?

Hamurungi was now preparing herself for the next episode of the television drama, when a loud knock banged the door. This was not the usual soft knock of the Minister. She turned her neck sideways to wait for the second knock. Bang, bang! someone now hit the door. Who could that be? It was probably some drunken guest returning to the hotel, having lost his way. Whoever it was, she was not going to open, damn! She turned her face to the television. The door was banged the third time. Hamurungi now chose to act. She threw insults at the person at the door. Did the knocker think her room was a lounge for drunks, or his concubine's house? The intruder must get lost before she lost her temper and called the Police. She looked at the side table to ascertain if the door key was there. It was. Well, let the stupid take care of themselves. She had much to celebrate, especially after the summary dismissal of the rude receptionist. Besides, she had just won the first step towards becoming Miss Tourism. She had reason to celebrate. She snuggled in the sofa, and glued her eyes to the television set.

Hamurungi was too engrossed in the television drama, that she did not notice a tall and huge dark-skinned woman standing near her sofa. It happened too quickly for her to make any sense out of it.

"Now I have caught you, shameless bitch!" the woman growled, gripping Hamurungi by the neck. Hamurungi turned her face up, to be met by a stare of deep angry eyes.

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"I am Veronica, never mind my presence. I only came to find out if my husband was really getting good care here," she said, letting loose of Hamurungi's neck. She pushed Hamurungi forward, and she fell headlong, on the patterned carpet. Veronica approached the now crouching Hamurungi, and started beating her with fists. Hamurungi howled, upon which Veronica increased her beatings. Soon, the corridor was jammed with baffled hotel staff. One of the housekeepers threw open the door, to reveal a tightly locked-up pair fighting like cockerels at war.

"I will kill you, whoring leech! I will teach you to poach on my husband's manhood," Veronica shrieked.

"Yes, teach her a lesson. Cut up her lustful cunt!" cried a male waiter, promptly offering a table knife to help accomplish his mischievous suggestion. The spectators burst into hilarious laughter at the remark. On hearing the laughter, Veronica increased her beating. She bent backward, and started removing her high-heeled shoes to use as an additional weapon of attack. Hamurungi took advantage of Veronica's action, and lifted herself to her feet. She immediately reached for the heavy metal ashtray on the side table and used it to attack Veronica's head. Taken completely unawares, Veronica's now bare feet stumbled, and she fell down on the floor. The onlookers cheered. Some clapped their hands to encourage Hamurungi's sudden display of strength. In a flash, Hamurungi was atop Veronica's huge body, scratching her face and pounding at her huge breasts.

"Beat some sense into the old *off-layer*. Who told her to bore her husband stiff with her fat belly?" cried one of the waiters in rude jest.

"I will give you some acid to pour on her ugly soot face. She's too stupid to know the things men like," rejoined another. With these encouraging jeers, Hamurungi gained more advantage over Veronica. She punctuated her ferocious physical attacks with verbal abuses.

"Idiot! Bed-bore! Ancient pig! You thought you owned the Minister alone? Silly goat, cut off his penis and tie it around your ugly habit of a skirt!" she taunted.

The hotel staff now circled the fighting pair. They had just thrown in more laughter when the Minister appeared at the door. As if tipped by some colluding hotel staff, two journalists strategically trailed behind the Minister. One of them carried a camera, which he immediately started putting to use, whereas the other carried a notebook. The Minister pushed through the swelling circle of staff, and fixed himself in the inner space. He tried to speak, but his words dried up on his lips before he uttered them. Big tears flowed from his eyes, and were sipped by the carpet. As some staff mumbled a few words of sympathy, the hotel security men appeared at the door. They immediately pushed the crowds out, and told them to get back to their stations. They turned to the journalists and pushed them with batons.

"You paparazzi, get the hell out of here! Nobody wants your rumor stories," one of the guards barked. The journalists replied that they wanted to get the whole story of the scandal, because it would make very interesting reading.

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It would add variety to the ever-increasing horror stories of wars, rebels, and cult murders. The guards were about to hound the journalists away, when the Minister intervened.

"Leave them alone, and please kindly let me have a private moment," he begged. The security guards knew that the Minister had already had too much humiliation. They did not want to add to his misery. They curtsied and left the room, their batons dangling in their hands. Meanwhile, the fighting women had disentangled themselves. Hamurungi has a slight cut above her left eye, while Veronica's nose bled profusely. She settled in the right corner of the room, and sobbed softly. She used the left side of her skirt to wipe her bleeding nose. The Minister turned to the journalists and addressed them.

"I know you are dying to print the pictures and the story, but kindly consider the opposite. I head the Ministry of Tourism, and the story will not only damage my career, but my integrity as well. My wife over there also needs protection," he said, pointing at the sobbing Veronica. The journalists looked at each other with puzzled expressions. The journalist with camera looked at his camera, the crying Veronica, and the now staring Hamurungi, then back at his camera. His journalistic instinct told him that although the notebook journalist might never write a story to accompany his pictures, the face of the devastated Veronica would do a good job of selling the paper, once used on the front page. He knew the sensational stance of the paper he worked for, and he believed the editor would jump up with glee at such hot stuff. He immediately formed a headline in his mind, although he knew that headline formation and writing was the job of the chief editor.

'Minister's Wife Strikes Husband's Sex Object' He smiled to himself, and put his camera in his bag. The journalist with notebook assumed a frozen gaze, and wished the Minister had not arrived so early at the scene. But it was never too late for a serious journalist to cook up a story of sorts. He knew very well that on a number of occasions, he had cooked, actually brewed up incredible stories of scandal and crime, just to please his editor's strict code on deadlines. At one time, he fabricated a story about a government big shot's involvement in *bichupuli*, and conveniently appendaged the favorite *sources preferred anonymity*. That story sold the paper like the proverbial hot cakes, and the editor invited him for a private *Vodka and Nile Special* celebration the following day. The journalist was genuinely happy with his achievement, albeit a bit jittery about the possibility of someone discovering his trick. The paper was content to keep publishing such juicy stories, provided they were sensational enough to arouse public interest for better dividends. The editor, and indeed the whole newspaper publishing company had never had cause to doubt the authenticity of stories and features, until one overzealous photo journalist brought in a picture of a woman in the nude, being gang-raped by uniformed policemen. The chief editor and sub editors had a tough time deciding whether to publish the picture or not, until the former agreed to take full responsibility of the consequences. He thanked the photojournalist for his discreet journalistic skills and the brave spirit exhibited in exposing the dark side of the country's very own law-keepers.

The paper editors were sued for defamatory publishing, because some people thought that the uniformed Police belonged to the

National Police Force, and by professional standards, beyond reproach. However, some sympathetic members of the public knew that beneath the impartial-looking black gowns of the court personalities lay an insatiable craving for ill-gotten money. They knew that nobody won a case, especially a much hyped-about one, without caressing the gloved hands of the judge with smart crispy bank notes. It was little wonder that some of such judges were constantly falling prey to the discreet snares of the Anti-corruption Commission. Big thoughts played in the mind of the print journalist, as he bargained between accepting and rejecting the Minister's proposal. His colleague, the camera journalist, had already stacked his camera away. Did he keep it because the Minister's proposal was agreeable, or because he wanted to act like the journalist who brought in the gang rape picture? He wished there was a way of reading his colleague's mind.

The Minister now looked composed, having overcome the desperate look on his face. He straightened himself and put his right hand in the inner pocket of his executive coat. He pulled out a check book, pulled a pen in the colors of the National flag from his breast pocket, and started writing on the plain surface of a check leaf. The journalists looked on, puzzled. Finally, he ripped off the written check and extended it towards the camera journalist.

"Have your share," he said.

Both journalists looked at the check, whose edges now danced in the slight evening breeze that wafted through the window. Nine million shillings! They were temporarily transfixed. The figure was unbelievable. The print journalist regained his senses first.

"Sir, we don't need such exorbitant amounts. Besides, that is not our check," he said.

"Don't be silly. You are better off setting yourselves up a nice mini supermarket in posh Kansanga, than keeping to your stupid game, haunting hotel rooms for dangerous stories. Besides, I don't see why intelligent young men like you should strut around wearing dirty jeans and second hand T-shirts, when you could do with trendy Edgar's suits," he replied.

"Sir, we are just doing our duty," the camera journalist reinforced. He was about to add more explanation, when the Minister barked.

"Stupid imbeciles! Who holds power here? You miserable poor rumor hunters, who sleep in one-roomed shacks in the slums, or me, the mighty Minister for Tourism? Have you ever enjoyed English breakfast, beside a luxury swimming pool, complete with imported Italian marble for walls, eh? I will not tolerate your impoverished impudence! You either accept your check and quit your dirty trade in rumors, or I swear by all the powers of my office that you will regret," he threatened. The journalists looked at one another, each fearing to entrust their innermost feelings and thoughts to the other. There was total silence in the room for a few seconds. Finally, the print journalist spoke.

"Sir, we have considered your wise advice and agreed to take it.

We shall start our own news company, sir, and will be happy if you gave us a maiden feature on the future of Tourism in this country," he said, extending his hand for the check. The camera journalist was too puzzled at his friend's sudden change of heart, but he could not speak against the action. At least, not in the presence of the Minister. The print journalist now silently read the amount in words and figures. The check was carefully written out, and dutifully endorsed with the signature of the Minister himself. It was a Ministry of Tourism check, as could be traced from the embossed seal carefully fixed in the right hand corner. The print journalist handed the check to his colleague to read.

"But, sir, there is no name of the payee on the check! the camera journalist complained, in the hope that the Minister could retrieve the check.

"Just as I suspected. No person in his or her right senses goes in for photojournalism. No photographer has any functioning grey matter in the brain. All you do is hound people from their bedrooms and toilets, just to snap a shot of trashy exposures for your depraved papers. You are the stinking goats, keen for what takes place under a person's pants. After failing in school, all you do is take photographs of matters that don't concern you, just to get your chicken feed payment from your scheming editors. You also resort to drawing ridiculous pictures of animal testicles! You are the worst vermin I have ever had the misfortune of coming across. You are the people who killed Princess Diana, because she had the privilege of enjoying a glamorous life that none of your tribe will ever sniff at!" he slammed the check book on the side table. He started breathing furiously. Veronica, whose sobbing had by now stopped, stood up. She moved a few steps from her corner, and addressed her husband.

"We are in this misery, because you have failed to honor the vows you made to me twenty years ago. Oh, James, to think that you could sink as low as this...looking for pleasure from a prostitute, oh..." she cried. Hamurungi, whose stare had turned into a steely look, thought it was time she spoke her mind.

"Blessings on you, poor lady. You are too naive to realize that your wrinkles and worn out cunt can no longer interest the Minister, eh? Ma-awe, you are just like Australia! Everybody knows it's there, somewhere down south, but nobody wants it. You had better..." she was interrupted before she could add more insults.

"Enough of your nonsense, girl! You have no right to talk to my wife like that. Are you so stupid, you can't know your boundaries? If that is the case, I will soon show you where you belong," the Minister warned. He now turned to the journalists.

"Get out of here, you fools. Write the name of your fancy on your check, and put none of your rubbish in the papers. The cost is high, remember?" he said, dismissing the journalists with a wave of his hand. Hardly had the journalists turned their backs, than the Minister shouted at them.

"Wait! Do you really think I am a fool? Remove that film at once!" he commanded. The camera journalist tried to resist, but the Minister gripped his hands with force. He plucked the bag from the journalist's shoulders, and ripped open the zip. He reached for the camera, and opened the film compartment.

12.
He pulled out a Kodak film, and pocketed it in his inner coat pocket.

"You can go now, but stand warned. Never cross my path again in your stupid search for rumors. Disappear!"

The journalists shuffled out of the room. They were completely overwhelmed.

They silently entered the descending lift. It was the camera journalist who spoke first.

"How could you accept the check? You have sold me out *kabisa!*" he accused.

"A hasty person makes most mistakes," his friend replied.

"The trick is like this. I accepted his check just to get out of his sight. Do you know we can use this check as evidence in court? Let's betray the lecherous brat in his ridiculous attempt to walk on everybody's back! Maybe our weak point now is the film he snatched. We would have to make do with scanty story lines, and possibly, interviews with the hotel staff," he said with a loud sigh.

The camera journalist calmed his friend's fears. His most selling shots were safe. By the time the Minister came to his senses, he had already finished two films, and they were safely lying in the inner pocket of his jacket. The Minister was definitely finished, because he had no idea that the film he took was still blank.

Ha-ha-ha! He-he-he-he-e-e-e! the journalists laughed loud, as the lift reached the basement area. They alighted and went straight to their parked motorbike. They rode away, still laughing jubilantly.

The day for the Miss Tourism Beauty Pageant was two days away. After the misfortunes of the Sheraton Hotel, Hamurungi thought she needed the pampering preliminaries to refresh her body. Fortunately for her, the journalists had acted wisely. They did not publish the scandalous story. Neither did they print the pictures. Luck was certainly on her side. For the last three days, the papers had been running the pictures and features of the last Miss Tourism Beauty Pageant winners. Hamurungi could not help but despise the selected candidates. Some of them had little flesh around their thighs, while others had no marked roundness on the buttocks. What a poor choice! she thought. If a similar group was brought this round, she was sure to walk away with the title and the shimmering Hyundai car. She would also get the free connection to the cell phone for six months. Since reporters said that most of the contestants were University students, she could safely begin to count her luck. Most of the University girls were nothing more than bags of thin skin and bones. She had met some of them doing the rounds at Speke, and she still remembered how she lost her catch to one of such girls. This time, she would have a better advantage. She knew the guest of honor personally-the Minister for Tourism, and if she remembered well, the Minister liked girls of Hamurungi's size, fleshy thighs and hips. There was a big chance that the Minister could use his position to see Hamurungi crowned Miss Tourism.

She has also not forgotten the Minister's remark that the next Miss Tourism event should feature girls whose beauty matched the values and ideals of the African continent. She recalled his merciless attack of foreign concepts of beauty, which were nothing better than spindly legs and bones sticking out of dry skin. The foreign countries dictated the beauty standards to third life countries, because they supplied the gifts for the winners. They also had stakes in the brand names of their products, forever displayed in the papers to show how powerful they were. According to the Minister, this was utter colonial nonsense. The Africans valued their well-endowed females, prancing about in the thick African bushes with rare animal species, their big rounded buttocks shaking in rhythm with the wind. With such recollections about the Minister's attitude, Hamurungi was certain about winning the crown. The two days left to the final event turned into a century for her!

Hamurungi woke up at five o'clock in the morning. She wanted to reach the Nile

Hotel International before any of the girls arrived. She must taste the beauty attendant's body cleansing scrub before any other girl. She switched on her small radio, with a hope of listening to the contest as a major news feature. She tuned to the National Radio for news, and got shrill sounds instead. "Nasty affair!" she cursed under her breath. The National Radio was known to have turned into a museum, since the steady mushrooming of FM stations. Its presenters knew how to snore to eight in the morning, and on vigilant days, presented news ten minutes after the scheduled time. Most of them had turned into perpetual drunks, complaining that their pay was too miserable to buy a better substitute. As if the drunkenness would give them a better pay! Hamurungi mused. She tuned to the FM band instead, and her favorite presenter's voice came through *Delight House* FM Radio station. This presenter was good at describing the tips that turned men on, and that was why Hamurungi liked him. Then the station's jingle for the news sounded, and Hamurungi picked her ears. The unmistakable voice of Kitty Williams welcomed the listeners to the news feature. Hamurungi had always thought Kitty Williams was a white American, first from the name, then to the accent. She spoke as if she just walked out of Chicago City. Hamurungi was shocked one day, when Kitty Williams' picture was featured in the papers, and her appearance had no connection with her name and accent. She looked as dark as soot, and the feature write-up accompanying her picture revealed that she was born in the Northern part of Uganda. Yes, the girl came from the warrior tribes and fierce clans of that part of the country, who were constantly killing each other for the neighbor's cattle, or sometimes chopping off people's lips because they were light skinned! *If they saw me, they would kill me first*, Hamurungi thought.

The news was not as exciting as Hamurungi expected. Kitty Williams said that by the eve of the special day, the office of the promoters had not received confirmation from the Minister for Tourism, although he was the guest of honor, and was expected to hand over prizes to the winning beauties. When

Delight House FM contacted his office for details, he was not available for comment.

However, the event organizers reminded the beauty contestants that the occasion was on, and wished them a happy swing on the catwalk.

Hamurungi slid her best lingerie up her thighs, and looked on approvingly. She reached for her tight-fitting dress made of pearls, and put it on. She then applied her make-up vigorously. She must reach the attendant's chambers earlier than any girl, she reminded herself. It was good she had deposited her creative dress with the attendant the previous day. She created her dress basing on the traditional *Karimojong* dress. Yes, she had modeled her attire borrowing from the ancient skills of those nomadic people, who, surprisingly, were the very clan members of Kitty Williams. She had chosen her dress after a lot of consultation with former beauty queens. They advised her to look for the most revealing thing she could find, because what mattered most in the contest was the amount of flesh a candidate displayed. And Hamurungi followed the advice to the letter. She knew that no man with an upright manhood resisted the tantalizing vibrations from shimmering thighs and buttocks of a naked female. She also knew that beauty contests were the most favored things around. They received quick funding from patrons, unlike the incessant documents of beggary made by hypocritical Non-governmental Organizations for AIDS orphans and mud-walled schools for sniveling village children. Yes, not all people were stupid, they knew exactly what was in vogue for the times. They knew precisely where the answer to their sensuous cravings lay: in the naked beauties of God's universe!

Hamurungi ascended the stairs of Nile Hotel International with great strides. As she reached the last step on the staircase, a small-bodied newspaper seller pushed a copy of *The Light* newspaper in her eyes. She barked at him, and told him to take his small business elsewhere. Hamurungi belonged to the big class of executives, whose air-conditioned offices subscribed for electronic delivery of the papers.

"Madam, this is about your contest today," the news vendor insisted. He had immediately guessed that Hamurungi belonged to the beauty contestants, from the way she dressed.

"That is none of your business. People of your kind are prohibited from entering!" she replied, adjusting her beaded bag on her shoulder. She entered the hotel.

Hamurungi found the beauty attendant reclining on the side table. Different costumes in various styles and color designs littered the table on which the attendant reclined.

"What's up, Mummy? Today is our lucky day. Why sit in silence as if you just lost one of your beauty girls? Get up and celebrate!" Hamurungi cheered. The attendant looked at Hamurungi with a lifeless expression. Hamurungi did not understand the cause of the woman's indifference. She was always vivacious and alive with humor. What was wrong? Hamurungi was about to conclude that the woman was probably getting a heart attack, when she suddenly spoke.

"We have been hit in the face. There is no Miss Tourism contest!" the woman announced. It took Hamurungi a few minutes to understand. What did this mean?

Was it a rude joke, like that carried around by people on April First, All Fools' Day? She cautioned the attendant against throwing nasty jokes.

The attendant challenged Hamurungi to prove her wrong if she doubted, by opening the middle page of *The Light* newspaper. She must also read the major headline. She said this while pointing to the newspaper, lying folded on the table, beside the contestants' costumes. Hamurungi sensed danger. Did some malicious person make an evil plot to frustrate the contest? she wondered. She gathered courage and lifted the paper from the table. She unfolded it slowly, and her eyes went to the headline: *BEAUTY CONTEST BARRED BY INTEGRITY MINISTRY*. Damn! What news was this? That was not the worst. The story went on to disclose how the Minister for Tourism, supposed to be the guest of honor, had already influenced the panel of judges to favor his sexual object. The story described in graphic detail, how the Minister's sexual object was a common whore who traded her wares of flesh on Speke Road. The story alluded to a fight between the Minister's wife and the prostitute in Sheraton Hotel, and how this scene between the two women was witnessed by a big number of people. The eye witnesses included two faithful journalists, and hotel staff who had the misfortune or rather the fortune of being present when the fight took place. One of the staff had the bad luck of getting a summary dismissal from hotel service, because she asked the Minister's prostitute an innocent question. The Integrity Ministry now stepped in, first to deal with the Minister who presented a Ministry account check to journalists as a bribe. He thought this would silence the story in the Sheraton. Second, the Ministry considered itself an agent of a sound moral and ethical code, and was therefore opposed to the idea of parading women's naked bodies for public gaze and commercialization. Third, barring the beauty contest was a move designed to remind the public that the country had laws against prostitution and indecent exposure. It was time the nation fought against the depraved agents of indecent exposure. By the time *The Light* went to press, the Minister for Tourism was in hiding. However, the concerted efforts of a committed investigative press would soon discover his nest of refuge. For the Sheraton scandal pictures, the readers could turn to the middle pages of the paper.

Hamurungi was transfixed by the story. How could she be so unlucky? How could she miss a chance of a lifetime, merely because some two stinking creeps in love with their stupid profession betrayed it all? And she had conveniently hidden her involvement with the Minister from her *manfriend* from Bank of Uganda. She hoped to prevail upon him soon for the promised better house! A-aa-yi-i-i-i-i, how could she be so betrayed? She remembered the story of Jezebel, and felt the same amount of shock that survivor of a woman must have felt as her gorgeous body descended towards the hard floor, to get smashed into pieces. She was still lost in her thoughts, when the door opened. In the doorway stood two armed female guards, and the two despicable journalists. She wanted to throw the most obscene insults at them, but her voice stuck deep in her throat.

"We are here under the directives of the Integrity Ministry," the two guards said in unison.

"We are here for the second part of your fleshy act-out," the journalists echoed.

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Rosemary Kyarimpa is a Ugandan-born Writer and Winner of the First Prize in Short Stories, National Book Trust of Uganda (2000). With a rich International experience and strong academic background, the author is a committed woman activist and human rights crusader. She has published two Short Story Books, in addition to contributing articles and academic papers to several International Journals. Her third book, a collection of feminist poetry, is lined up as her next literary project. Recently, Ms Kyarimpa expanded her writing talents into filmmaking, at the prestigious Boston University (USA). **Watch this space for more exciting updates on Featured Writers. EaUnited.Com**